Skip and Loafer
story and art by
MISAKI TAKAMATSU
volume
5



Skip and Loafer


5

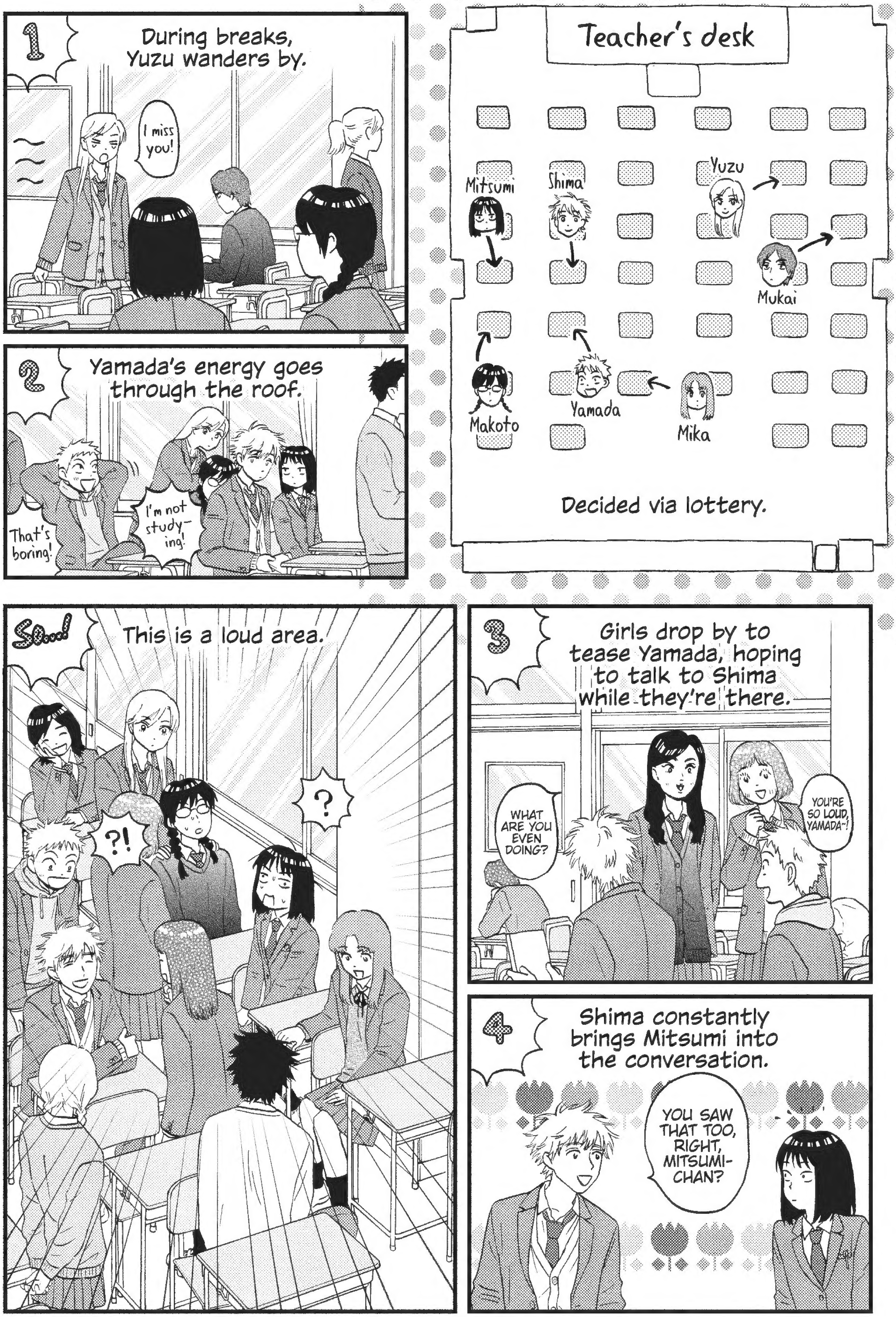
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Misaki Takamatsu


The hubbub from tests and the school festival has died down...
It's November now.
and we're all back in everyday mode.
BINK
てん
BINK
てん
PLOP
ポロッ
Except for one thing.



Scene 24 Fidgety Adolescence


SMILE
We're in new seats.


1
During breaks, Yuzu wanders by.
I miss you!
2
Yamada's energy goes through the roof.
That's boring!
I'm not studying!
Teacher's desk
Mitsumi
Shima
Yuzu
Mukai
Makoto
Yamada
Mika
Decided via lottery.
This is a loud area.
?!
?
3
Girls drop by to tease Yamada, hoping to talk to Shima while they're there.
WHAT ARE YOU EVEN DOING?
YOU'RE SO LOUD, YAMADA~!
4
Shima constantly brings Mitsumi into the conversation.
YOU SAW THAT TOO, RIGHT, MITSUMI-CHAN?


げんなり...
utterly drained...
YOUR EYES LOOK DEAD, MAKOC-CHAN.
WANT A MEAT-BALL?
YES.
ALIVE ENOUGH TO EAT, I GUESS.
I MUST CONFESS.
WOO~!
AS A JUNIOR HIGH RECLUSE, I *MAY* HAVE NURSED A SLIVER OF ENVY FOR THE SO-CALLED COOL KIDS.
FRANKLY, PART OF ME IS THRILLED TO BE KIND-OF SORT-OF UNDER THAT UMBRELLA NOW...
BUT THREE DAYS OF IT IS ENOUGH!
MY HEAD'S ABOUT TO EXPLODE!
Ex-BF.
Kinda.
Same club.
Different clubs.
Chat often.
Fan?
Friends.
Pals.
Seats are close.
Same hype levels.
Thinks she's cute.
Gorgeous.
Other class.
Steals glances.
AND ALWAYS AT THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE IS SHIMA SOUSUKE!
YEAH, SHIMA-KUN'S PRETTY POPULAR.
Whoa.
BA-DMP
HE'S A FORCE OF NATURE!


DUDE. ARE YOU SERIOUS?
I'M NOT THAT POPULAR, AM I?
STRAW-BERRY MILK
I GUESS I'D SAY...
IT'S LIKE HAVING FANS.
THE THINGS I'D DO TO SAY A LINE LIKE THAT...
I'VE BEEN ASKED FOR MY NUMBER AND STUFF...
PEOPLE WHO DO GET ASKED OUT, GET ASKED OUT ALL THE TIME.
BUT I'VE ONLY BEEN ASKED OUT TWICE IN MY WHOLE LIFE.
TWICE?!
SO PEOPLE FIGURE THEY SHOULDN'T EVEN BOTHER.
THAT'S IT?
That's still loads by my standards.


SO, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YAMADA, YUZU?
REAL TALK.
YAMADA-KUN *DOES* LAUGH A LOT MORE WHEN HE'S WITH YOU.
WHAAAT? NO WAY.
HE'S NICE, BUT I'M NOT, LIKE, *INTO* HIM.
No way, huh?
ANYWAY, YAMADA'S JUST DESPERATE FOR A GIRL-FRIEND.
BUT ME? I NEED TO BE *ROMANCED.*
KRUNCH
HEE HEE.
YOU'RE SO CUTE, YUZU-CHAN.
YEAH... I'D FEEL A LOT BETTER ABOUT A GUY WHO WANTED *ME*, NOT JUST A GIRLFRIEND.
ULTIMATELY, HIS DESPERATION IS ONLY HURTING HIMSELF.
FOOLISH-NESS, THY NAME IS YAMADA.
OH! THIS GIRL IN MY CLUB SAID SHE THINKS MUKAI-KUN IS CUTE!
AH. SO HE *IS* POPULAR.
HIS TOTAL DISINTEREST COMES OFF AS CONFI-DENCE.


SO, I TRADED CONTACT INFO WITH NANAKA-CHAN AT THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL, AND SHE'S LEFT ME ON READ FOR THREE WHOLE DAYS.
WHAT AM I DOING WRONG?!
LET'S SEE IT.
OHHH, I KNOW.
"THERE'S A FULL MOON TOMORROW."
HA HA HA!
HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THAT?
MRRGH!
YOU ALWAYS LAUGH AT MY FAILURES, MUKAI!
DON'T YOU WANT A GIRLFRIEND, TOO?!
OR ARE YOU ALREADY AN OLD MAN?!
I DO WANT ONE, ACTUALLY.
THEN WHY DO YOU ALWAYS GO STRAIGHT HOME?
BECAUSE I DON'T WANT... JUST ANY GIRLFRIEND.
AH. HE'S SHY.


THAT BEING SAID...
GLOOOM
YAMADA HAS AT LEAST ADMITTED HIS DESIRE TO DATE. SO HE MIGHT END UP WITH SOMEONE SOONER THAN ANY OF US.
THE IMPETUS ISN'T IMPORTANT. CAREFULLY NURTURING YOUR RELATION-SHIP--
NOT ANOTHER WORD, MAKOTO.
BUT FROM THAT PERSPECTIVE, ISN'T YAMADA-KUN... RESPECT-ABLE?
YEAH. WE SHOULDN'T BE SO QUICK TO JUDGE GUYS.
Words of wisdom.
IT'S WRONG TO THINK IN TERMS OF "BOYS VERSUS GIRLS" IN THE FIRST PLACE.
YEAH, IT'S PERSON VERSUS PERSON.
It's all about compro-mise and respect!
Can we stop for juice on the way back to class?
You know it~!


I JUST WANT A GIRLFRIEND. I DON'T EVEN CARE WHO SHE IS.
HE'S REACHED HIS BREAKING POINT.
KEEP IT DOWN.
NO, FOR REAL.
I'M DONE.
SHUDDER...
PUBERTY SUCKS.
IT'S JUST A BUNDLE OF BIOLOGICAL IMPULSES.
KSSH
MUMBLE
WHY DO GIRLS HAVE TO LOOK SO SOFT AND SQUISHY, HUH? IT'S NOT FAIR.
MUTTER
HEY!
SPEAKING OF SOFT AND SQUISHY...
I THOUGHT WE COULD PLAY WITH THESE CANDY KITS!
SUDDENLY, DIY CANDY.
And one for each of us, too.
DAAANG! BLAST FROM THE PAST!
The Power of Science
BUBBLE CANDY PANIC
Grape
Squishable Gummies
Make your own unique gummies!
The Mystery Snack
Nette Nerune
Strawberry



SHWMP
BWA HA! THEY TURNED INTO JELLY BUBBLES!
THEY USED TO HAVE ROBOT DROPPERS.
MMM! SILKY!
IT'S ALMOST... SEXY!
GA HA HA!
YOU WISH.
BOYS.
NO WORDS...


DWE-
HEH!
AH HA
HA!
KYA
HA!
Ow,
my
sides!
IS IT
REALLY
THAT
FUNNY?
GIRLS.
WHO EVEN
KNOWS?
AH HA
HA!
HEY,
WHAT'S
SO
FUNNY?
NOTHING!


キーンコーン
BING BONG
カーンコーン
BING BONG
What if someday...
MITSUMI.
she says she has feelings for him?
SHE DRAWS IN SHIMA-KUN LIKE A MAGNET. WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?


Makoto and Yuzu would support her. That's certain.
And I'd kiss my chances of confessing goodbye.
Way too awkward.
Ooh. But if I con-fessed first...?
Getting the others on my side would be, well, huge.
But this is Shima-kun we're talking about.
If he rejected me...
the whole school would know I asked him out and got shot down.
Forget it. Not happen-ing.
But that's not all.
If I asked him out just to score points off Mitsumi...


I'd never forgive myself.



WHY DO I HAVE TO FALL FOR THE POPULAR GUYS?
UGH.
See ya!
Bye-bye.


Student Council Office
The second-semester officers have taken over the student government. Which means...
ガチャ
CLICK
GOOD AFTER-NOON~!
Takamine-senpai has finally become student council president!
......!
HELLO, MADAM PRESIDENT!
HELLO...
MADAM VICE PRESIDENT!

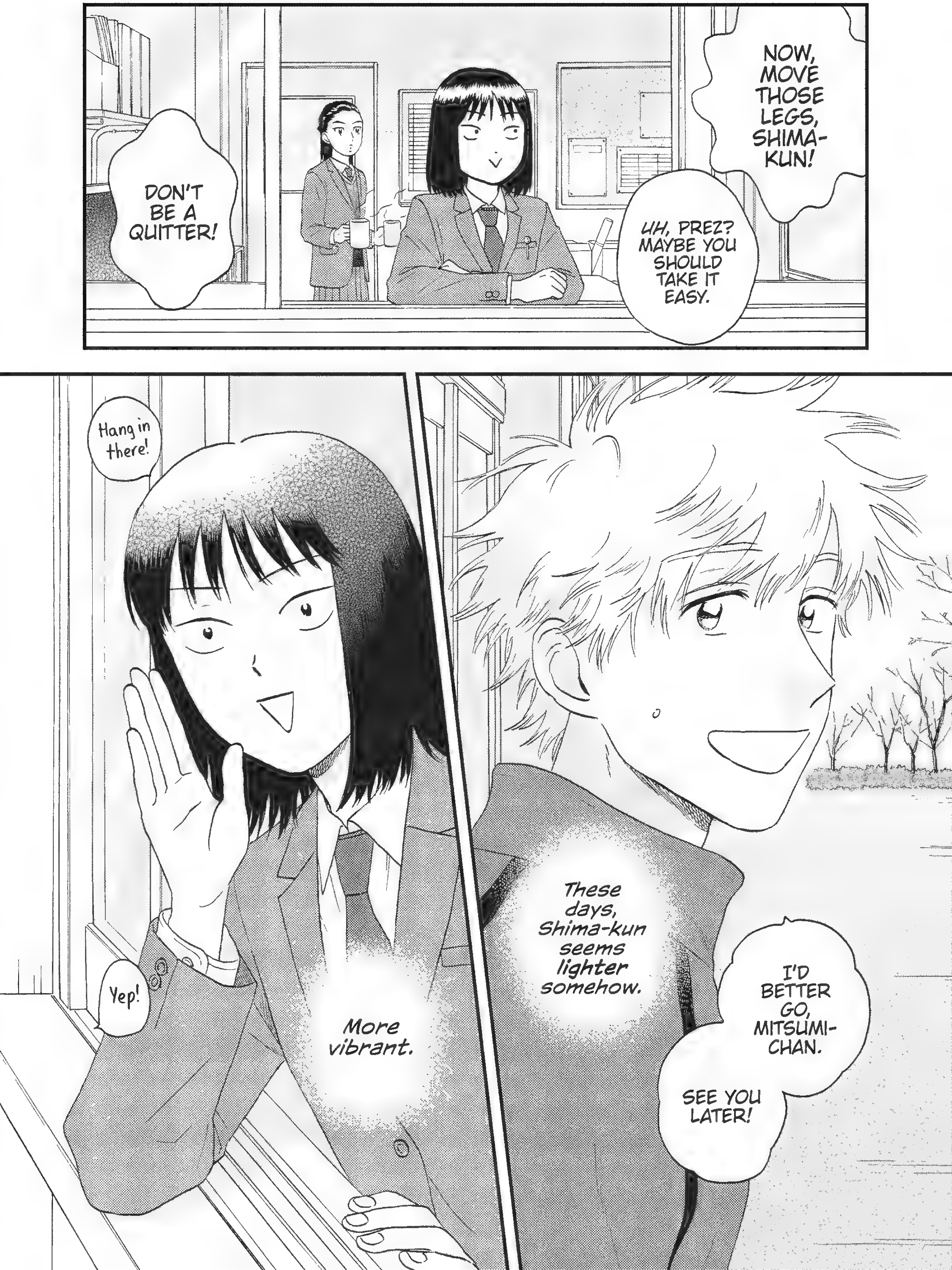

WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TO DO TODAY, DO WE?
I'm VP now!
NO, WE DON'T.
ONCE YOU FINISH ENTERING THIS DATA, YOU CAN WORK ON YOUR PERSONAL PROJECTS.
OKAY.
Kazakami-senpai, true to his word, retired after the first semester. In name, at least.
ガチャ
GACHAK
GOOD AFTER-NOON~!
KAZAKAMI-KUN.
DO YOU LIKE MARSH-MALLOWS?
SORRY?
NOBODY IN MY FAMILY WILL EAT THEM.


GOTTA JET. CRAM SCHOOL AWAITS.
SEE YA.
OH, THANK YOU. I'LL PUT ON SOME TEA.
NAH, THAT'S OKAY.
As you can see, he still stops by now and then.
OOH. THESE ARE THE GOOD ONES.
HEH HEH.
HOW DOES BLACK TEA SOUND, MITSUMI-SAN?
But the biggest change of all...
TAp
TAp


is that Shima-kun joined the Drama Club.
Hey!
I MEEEAN, AT FIRST, I JUST DIDN'T WANT TO ACT ANYMORE.
BUT NOW I REALIZE I MIGHT NOT HAVE COME UP WITH THAT THOUGHT ON MY OWN.
BASICALLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT ACTING ANYMORE.
SO, I'LL GIVE IT A SHOT TO FIND OUT.


SLIDE
カラララ
ARE YOU JOGGING TODAY?
YEP.
TO BUILD UP STAMINA OR SOMETHING, I GUESS.
ぜいっ WHEEZE!
GASP! はぁ
NO...!
N-NO S-SLACKING OFF, SHIMA-KUN!
PREZ HAS THE LEAST STAMINA OF US ALL, THOUGH.
ぜい WHEEZE!
ぜい WHEEZE!
OH!
M-MITSUMI-KUN!
S-SEE?
ぜい WHEEZE!
ぜい WHEEZE!
YOU CAN NEVER SAY NEVER!


WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
?
"WON'T YOU HELP ME CONVINCE SHIMA-KUN TO JOIN THE ACTING CLUB?!"
OH!
"HE'S NOT GOING TO JOIN YOUR CLUB."
Hee hee!
WHEN YOU'RE RIGHT, YOU'RE RIGHT.
はあっ HUFF!
はぁ PUFF!
EXACTLY!
?


NOW, MOVE THOSE LEGS, SHIMA-KUN!
UH, PREZ? MAYBE YOU SHOULD TAKE IT EASY.
DON'T BE A QUITTER!
These days, Shima-kun seems lighter somehow.
I'D BETTER GO, MITSUMI-CHAN.
SEE YOU LATER!
Hang in there!
Yep!
More vibrant.


I LOVE IT.


TUP
ザッ
TUP
ザッ
One, two!
One, two!
One, two!


MITSUMI-SAN? I'LL LEAVE YOUR TEA OVER HERE.
OH!
I-I'M SORRY FOR NOT HELPING!
You're fine.
This tea was a gift. It's quite good.
Sure is! It smells so nice.
I...
I SEE.



Scene 24 END



Scene ㉕ Head-Spinning First Love



Hello, everyone back home in Ikajima. I hope you're well.
This is the time of year when fish are fatty and delicious.
Is Maharu doing well in wind ensemble?
How are Granny's knees holding up?
Oh...how am I, you ask?
I'm doing well. No changes.
Er... Actually, that's not entirely true.
I'm not sure how to say this...
but at the age of fifteen, I, Iwakura Mitsumi...


have fallen in love...
for the very first time. I think.



きゃー
SQUEE!
I KNEEEW IT!
Y-YOU DID?!
WELL, YEAH! A CUTE GUY LIKE THAT, AAAND YOU'RE TWO PEAS IN A POD? I'D FALL FOR HIM TOO! HEE HEE HEE.
Y-YOU WOULD?!
MM-HM~! EVERY TIME YOU'D CALL, I'D THINK, "HOW IS SHE NOT ALREADY HEAD OVER HEELS FOR THIS GUY?!"
IT'S ALWAYS "SHIMA-KUN, SHIMA-KUN, SHIMA-KUN" WITH YOU.
HMPH! HRMGH...


HECK, YOUR FRIENDS IN CLASS PROBABLY FIGURED IT OUT BEFORE YOU DID.
HUNH ...
NO. THEY'D NEVER SUSPECT!
I MEAN, I ONLY JUST REALIZED MYSELF.
SUUURE.
BIP
TA-TUNK
SOOO...
FWEE
GONNA ASK HIM OUT?
SLIP
KLATTER
BONK
WAAAH!
HUH?!
YOU ALL RIGHT?! YOU DIDN'T BREAK ANYTHING, DIDJA?!
NOPE. CAUGHT IT.


A-A-ANYWAY, I HAVEN'T EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT IT!
WHAAAT? REALLY?
SHAAAA...
WELL, Y'KNOW, DECEMBER'S CREEPING UP ON US.
YOU'VE KNOWN HIM FOR A MIGHTY LONG TIME.
STAB
STAB
YOU GOTTA TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ALL THE FUN STUFF COMING UP! CHRISTMAS, VALENTINE'S...
PLUS, IF YOU KEEP DRAGGIN' YOUR FEET, YOU MIGHT END UP IN DIFFERENT CLASSES.
AGH! UGH...
HOW DID YOU START DATING YOUR BOYFRIEND, FUMI?
HE ASKED ME OUT.
FWEET...
THEN HOW COME YOU'RE TELLING ME TO DO THE ASKING?
WELL, I SENT SIGNALS. LET HIM KNOW I WAS INTERESTED, Y'KNOW?
Ooh...
THAT'S GOOD.
HEH HEH.
SO... THAT'S HOW IT WORKS.
ONCE YOU LIKE A GUY, YOU GO INTO THE TELLING HIM PHASE.
FUU!
FUU!
THAT'S RIGHT. BUT REMEMBER.



THAT ANXIOUS DO THEY OR DON'T THEY LIKE ME PERIOD...
HEH
IS ALMOST THE MOST FUN OF ALL!
GAAN!
カ――ン!
TH-THAT'S SO MATURE!
MY OLDEST, BESTEST FRIEND IS CLIMBING THE STAIRS OF ADULT-HOOD.
THE HEAT IS ON!
BUT I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THAT NOW. MIDTERMS ARE COMING UP.
I DID USED TO FANTASIZE ABOUT GETTING A BOYFRIEND, THOUGH.


CLAMOR
ざわっ
LOOK!
SHE'S ARRIVED, EVERYONE!
IT'S IWAKURA MITSUMI, THE STUDENT COUNCIL PRESIDENT AND TOP STUDENT OF THE ENTIRE SCHOOL!
SHE'S SO DIGNIFIED AND WONDERFUL!
SQUEE! きゃあ
SQUEE! きゃあ
I BEG YOUR PARDON, IWAKURA-SAN.
SKSH
IT'S HIGH-ACHIEVER GREATGUY-KUN, THE COOLEST GUY IN SCHOOL! HE'S SMART, FUN, AND HANDSOME!
MAY I TELL YOU SOMETHING IN PRIVATE?
IF THEY STARTED DATING, THEY'D RULE THE SCHOOL AS THE MOST PERFECTEST COUPLE EVER!
YOU WANTED TO TALK, HIGH-ACHIEVER-KUN?
YES. THE TRUTH IS...


THE MORE I KNOW YOU, THE MORE I FALL FOR YOU, IWAKURA-SAN!
WILL YOU GO OUT WITH ME?!
OHHH!
I'M SORRY, HIGH-ACHIEVER-KUN.
I CANNOT GO OUT WITH YOU, NOR ANYONE!
IWAKURA-SAN, PLEASE!
MY AMBITIONS WILL NOT TAKE A BACK SEAT TO ROMANTIC PURSUITS.
YEAH...THAT KIND OF SELF-SACRIFICE WOULD BE SO COOL.


I GUESS I'LL TRY OUT THAT SCENARIO WITH SHIMA-KUN.
HEY, MITSUMI-CHAN.
WANNA BE MY GIRL-FRIEND?
YUP!
Yaaay!
NO HESITA-TION.
即答
URGH...
I'M SO WEAK!!


OH!
WAIT! I'M GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF. SHOULDN'T I WORRY HE'D REJECT ME FIRST?
HOW CARELESS OF ME, EVEN FOR A FANTASY.
BUT HOW WONDERFUL WOULD IT BE TO STUDY TOGETHER AND GROW STRONGER AS A COUPLE?
THEN AGAIN, HE AND I ARE VERY CLOSE...
"I THINK THIS IS THE FIRST TIME...
"I'VE EVER BEEN REAL FRIENDS...
"WITH A GIRL."
BUT THAT WOULD MEAN...!


HUH? O-OH. I'M SORRY.
DON'T GET ME WRONG, I'M REALLY FLATTERED. IT'S JUST...
I THOUGHT YOU WERE A TRUE FRIEND, MITSUMI-CHAN.
DROOP
BUT... HUNH. I GET IT NOW.
CAN WE STILL BE FRIENDS?
N...
NATURALLY! FORGET I SAID ANYTHING!
And so, their relationship became strained, and they awkwardly drifted apart.
YEEEK!
THERE'D BE NO COMING BACK FROM THAT!
Agh...
WHAT CHANGES AFTER YOU START DATING, ANYWAY?!
IS IT WORTH THAT KIND OF RISK...?


すｯ GLOOOOM ん
Unable to focus on studying, she is full of self-loathing.
MORNING, KOHARU-CHAN!
YOU'RE HERE EARLY TODAY.
MM-HM...I WAS GONNA STUDY.
HEYA, MITSUMIN!
YOU'RE EARLY, TOO.
YEPPERS!
Boyfriend.
SAEKI-KUN AND I ARE MORNING PEOPLE. WE GRABBED A COFFEE BEFORE SCHOOL.
Her happiness is blinding!
HOO-WHOA!


KOHARU-CHAN?
MAY I ASK YOU A PERSONAL QUESTION?
WHISPER...
SURE, WHAT'S UP?
WHAT'S IT LIKE HAVING A BOY-FRIEND?
IS IT ANY DIFFERENT FROM BEING FRIENDS?
Huh?
WELL, YEAH! OF COURSE IT IS!
IT MEANS YOU'RE *SPECIAL* TO EACH OTHER.
AND THAT'S A REALLY, REALLY HAPPY THING.
I...I SEE.
NOW SHE'S SPAR-KLING.
WAAAHHH!!!
MORNING~!


WHAT'S UP? GIRL TALK?
HEH HEH... YEP. TALKIN' ABOUT LOVE.
WAH, WAH, WAH!!
HAVE YOU EVER HAD A GIRLFRIEND, SHIMA-KUN?
※Koharu-chan is a little dense.
OH, UH... YEAH, I DID.
IN JUNIOR HIGH.
AHA! I KNEW IT!
SHUNK
I HAVE S-STUDYING TO DO.
WOBBLE...
WELL, I HAD MY SUSPICIONS, BUT I'M STILL REELING.


Shima-kun's girlfriend.
What sort of girl was she?
Probably cute and popular.
Or maybe a glamorous older girl.
Honestly, I've never given much thought to appearance.
My own or others'.
But now that I look around...
everyone else...
seems pretty focused on it.


WHEN I'M PUTTING TOGETHER AN OUTFIT, I WORRY ABOUT COORDINATING AND STUFF.
Hunh.
Y-YOU DO?!
OHH. YEAH, I GET THAT.
AND NOW, I WONDER IF *I'M* THE STRANGE ONE FOR NOT THINKING ABOUT IT UNTIL NOW.
But Mika-chan reads loads of fashion maga-zines...
and Yuzu-chan combs oil through her hair every night to keep it silky-smooth.
Fashion takes serious effort.
WHEN I CAME HERE, I THOUGHT BEING IN TOKYO AUTOMATICALLY MADE YOU STYLISH.


LOOK AT ME! I'VE WORN THIS SWEATER SINCE JUNIOR HIGH. IT'S FULL OF HOLES.
See? My thumbs poke right through.
BUT DOES IT BOTHER ME?
IT REALLY SHOULD!
BA-BAM!
ばーん!
AND HERE I AM, COMING TO SCHOOL WITHOUT BOTHERING TO FIX MY BED HEAD!
DON'T BE HARD ON YOURSELF.
THAT'S IT. WE'RE TAKING YOU TO UNIQLO AND COSME AFTER EXAMS!
GOOD IDEA!
WE CAN PICK OUT DECENT OUTFITS FOR MITSUMI AND MAKOTO!
MAKEUP, HUH...?
I'M STARTING TO FEEL LIKE A REAL GIRL NOW.
......

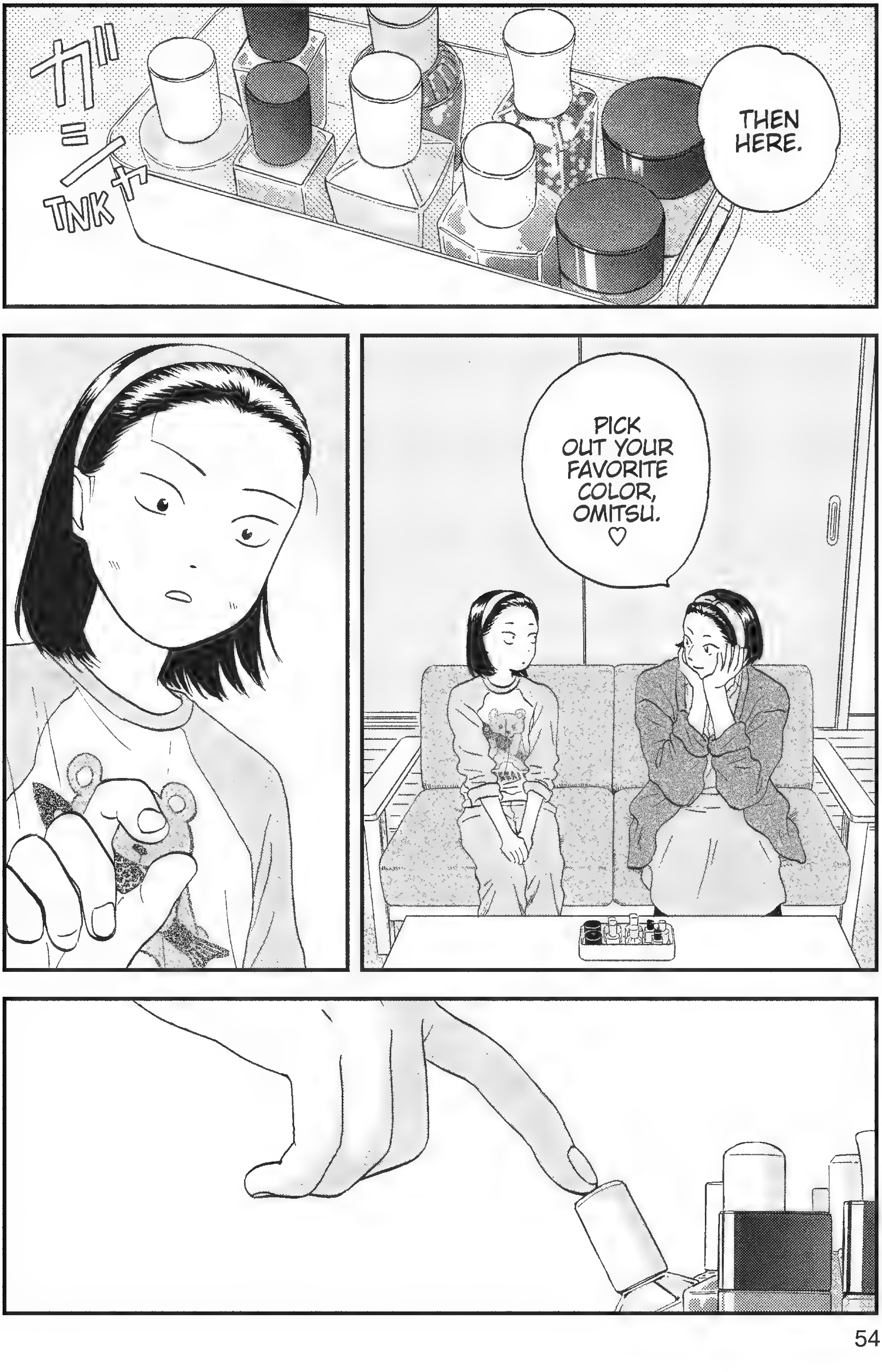

YAAAWN
ふあ
TIME TO BRUSH MY TEETH.
トTp タ
トTp タ
MY FRIENDS ARE GONNA TEACH ME HOW TO USE MAKEUP.
OH! THAT'S SWEET OF THEM.
Yep.
SURE IS.
BUT IT FEELS KINDA WEIRD, TOO.
ACK!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, OMITSU?


IN MY MIND, IT WAS NORMAL FOR BOYS AND GIRLS TO PLAY TOGETHER. NOBODY CARED WHO WAS WHAT.
DON'T GET ME WRONG. I WAS EXCITED TO LEARN ABOUT FASHION AND MAKEUP.
BUT IT WAS ALWAYS THIS THING YOU DID WHEN YOU WERE OLDER.
WHEN DOES EVERYONE REACH THAT POINT?
WHEN DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE OLD ENOUGH TO DRESS UP AND FALL IN LOVE?
IT'S LIKE EVERYONE ELSE KNOWS AND I'M PLAYING CATCH-UP.


ガラガラ
GARGLE GARGLE
WHUFF'RE YOU TAWKIN' 'BOUT?
ぺっ
P'TOO!
ザー
SHAAA
I DIDN'T GET INTO FASHION OR ROMANCE, OR EVEN CONFRONT MY OWN *IDENTITY* UNTIL I WENT OUT INTO THE WORLD.
YOU CAN DEAL WITH ALL THAT WHEN YOU'RE READY.
FUMI-CHAN DOESN'T WEAR MAKEUP.
DOES THAT MAKE HER LESS CUTE THAN THE PRIMPED-UP TOKYO GIRLS?
SHAKE
ぶん
SHAKE
ぶん
ズイッ
ZWMP
I SPEND TEN THOUSAND YEN A MONTH ON THESE NAILS!


BUT DOES THAT MAKE GRANNY'S ROUGH AND CALLOUSED HANDS ANY LESS BEAUTIFUL?
NO.
HERS ARE PRETTY, TOO.

IT'S EASY TO GET YANKED AROUND BY FASHION CULTURE AT YOUR AGE.
BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, IT'S ABOUT WHAT FULFILLS *YOU*.
YOU CAN START AND QUIT WHENEVER YOU WANT. THAT'S WHAT I SAY.
MAKES SENSE.
YOU SEE?
SO, OMITSU...
DO YOU WANT SOMEONE TO SEE YOU AS MORE OF A GIRL?
UMMM...
MAYBE A LITTLE. I'M STILL FIGURING IT OUT.


TNK
THEN HERE.
PICK OUT YOUR FAVORITE COLOR, OMITSU. ♡


MORNING, MITSUMI-CHAN.
HI, SHIMA-KUN.
GOOD MORNING.
ANOTHER STUDY DAY, HUH?
YUP.
I HAVE CATCHING UP TO DO.
I'LL LOOK OVER MY OLD HOME-WORK IN SOLIDARITY.


THANKS.
KRNKL
Oh, hey.
YOU PAINTED YOUR NAILS.
Y-YUP.


LIGHT PINK.
I THOUGHT IT WAS A PRETTY COLOR. LIKE CHERRY BLOSSOMS.
YEAH.
IT LOOKS GOOD.


Seat neighbors.
Friends.
FOR NOW...
I'M PERFECTLY HAPPY WITH THAT.

Scene 25 END

Scene 26 Smarting Girl 〈1〉

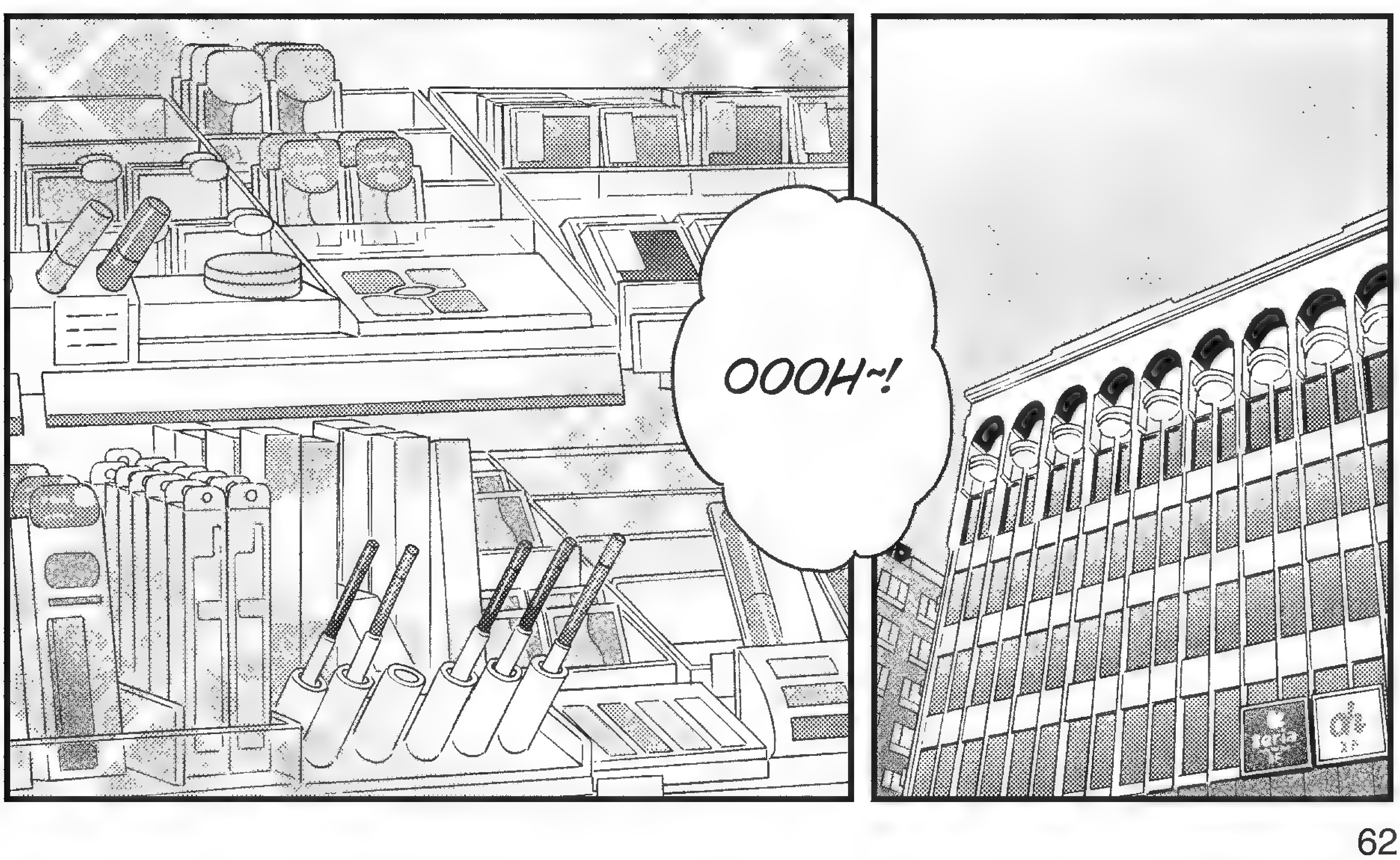



LIBRARY
Literary Club's
BEST READS
Arrange
THERE. I THINK WE'RE DONE HERE!
THIS IS PERFECT!
I HOPE A LOT OF PEOPLE CHECK THEM OUT.
I'VE READ THIS ONE, TOO.
I COULDN'T PUT IT DOWN.
YOUR PICKS NEVER MISS, KURUME-SAN.



*Tokyo's used-book district. A popular haunt for book lovers.




OOOH~!


ALL THIS STUFF GOES ON YOUR *FACE*?!
THIS LIP STAIN WAS SO HOT A WHILE AGO!
OH MY GOD, I *LOVE* THAT COLOR!
TONER BOOSTER...
THERE'S SOMETHING YOU PUT ON *BEFORE* TONER?!
THERE'S LIQUID *AND* POWDER FOUNDATION!
One's liquid and the other's solid.
Look.
THERE ARE A TON OF SPONGE SHAPES, TOO.
ス
BLANK...
IT'S OKAY! DON'T BE SCARED!
YEAH, DON'T OVERTHINK THIS!
....



WE'RE STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL, SO WE DON'T NEED TO USE ALL OF THAT STUFF.
Our skin is oily as it is.
IF YOU OVERDO IT, YOU COULD EVEN CAUSE DAMAGE.
For now, start with basic skin care.
Toner.
Lotion.
Shape your brows if you need to.
Shave.
Cut the longer hairs.
Pluck.
Apply a thin layer of a gentle cream to your face.
You both have clear skin, so tap it into problem areas like red spots or the creases of your nose.
You can use your fingers...
or a sponge if you want.
Next, control your shiny spots with face powder or baby powder, blend it in, and you're done!


HUNH. IT'S THAT EASY?!
Yeah.
IT'S FINE TO START OFF SIMPLE.
I MEAN, YOU WOULDN'T CAKE ON MAKEUP RIGHT OUT OF THE GATE, RIGHT?
You can wash this stuff off with soap.
YOU COULD ALSO FILL IN YOUR EYEBROWS, AND THERE ARE THRIFTY PRODUCTS FOR YOUR CHEEKS AND LIPS. PLUS...
UH... WHAT?
YOU'RE AMAZING, MIKA-CHAN!
YOU COULD TEACH MAKEUP CLASSES!
RESPECT
EWWW, STOP.
AH HA HA!
KNOWING MAKOTO, THOUGH, SHE'LL PROBABLY SAY...
No thanks. I'll pass.
Too much work.


I...
I THINK I'LL START WITH THIS.
Hmph!
THANKS FOR ALL YOUR HELP!


IT WAS FUN!
LATER.
I'M SURPRISED YOU BOUGHT ANYTHING, MAKOTO.
MEH, WELL...
I JUST... FELT LIKE IT.
AH HA HA!
AWW, NEXT YOU'LL BE TELLING ME YOU HAVE A CRUSH ON SOMEONE!


......
I'M GOING HOME.
Aww!
きゃー
EEEE!
YOU DO?! YOU DO, DON'T YOU?!
AAAH! I KNEW IT!!
NUH-UH! WE'RE STOPPING FOR TEA! C'MON!
CELSUS CAFE


A...
A DATE?!
IT IS NOT.
WE'RE JUST GOING TOGETHER.
Eee!
BUT IT'S THE WEEK-END!
GOING OUT ALONE WITH THE GUY YOU LIKE? THAT IS SO TOTALLY A DATE~!
IT'S HONDA-SENPAI. HE'S A SECOND-YEAR.
WE'RE BOTH IN LIT CLUB.
OH MY GOSH! TELL ME AAALL ABOUT HIM!
I WOULDN'T SAY I'M CRUSHING ON HIM. I JUST LIKE HIM, THAT'S ALL.
WE LIKE THE SAME BOOKS...
AND WE HAVE FUN CHATTING.


MAKOTO! THAT'S SO SWEEEET!
D'AWWW—!
STOP.
GUH!
THIS IS EXACTLY WHY I DIDN'T WANT TO TELL YOU.
Oh!
BUT LET'S KEEP THIS BETWEEN THE TWO OF US.
IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS, I'D DIE OF EMBARRASSMENT.
SAY NO MORE!
IT'LL BE OUR SECRET.
NO, SERIOUSLY! IF HE'S GIVING YOU HIS DAY OFF, THERE'S NO WAY THE ATTRACTION ISN'T MUTUAL!
CHANCES LIKE THIS DON'T COME EVERY DAY! YOU HAVE TO SEIZE IT BEFORE IT'S GONE!
A...ALL RIGHT. FINE!


HUNH. SO APPARENTLY, JINBOCHO IS THE MECCA OF CURRY.
CHECK IT OUT. GOOD, HUH?
AHH. THAT'S MY FAVORITE KIND.
BUT IS IT OKAY FOR A FIRST DATE?
GOOD MORNING.
OH HEY, MITSUMI.
パッ
SHWMP
PRETTY COLD TODAY, HUH?
Oh.


HELLO, SENPAI.
HELLO.
DID YOU HEAR WE'RE CLEANING THE CLUB ROOM TOMORROW?
YES, I HEARD. WE'LL NEED OUR GYM CLOTHES, RIGHT?
WE'RE EVEN OPENING PANDORA'S CABINET.
WE'LL NEED ALL THE GOOD LUCK WE CAN GET!
GOT IT!
WAS THAT THE GUY?
UH-HUH.
OOH. YOU DO GET ALONG~!


BUT I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING DECENT TO WEAR.
I'LL LOAN YOU SOME-THING!
WE'RE ABOUT THE SAME HEIGHT.
HMM... CUTE, BUT NO.
LOOKS A BIT TOO TRY-HARD.
YOU SHOULD DRESS CASUAL, BUT STILL STYLISH!
UH... RIGHT.
HOW ABOUT SOMETHING LIKE THIS?
RIGHT...
I'm com-pletely lost.
MILKFED


LET'S TRY A SIMPLE HAIRSTYLE.
Glasses off!
......
THIS WOULD ALL LOOK AMAZING ON YUZU.
BUT SHE LIKES PLAYING DRESS-UP.
IT'S EASY TO FEEL MOTIVATED WHEN YOUR HARD WORK ALWAYS PAYS OFF.
BUT FOR ME...
IT'S SCARY.
YOU HAD A BOYFRIEND IN JUNIOR HIGH, RIGHT?


Ohh. That.
YEEAAH. THE THING IS, WE NEVER *DID* ANYTHING.
WORD GOT AROUND THAT SOME GUY IN ANOTHER CLASS HAD A CRUSH ON ME.
MY FRIENDS ALL PRESSURED ME INTO DATING THE GUY.
I DIDN'T KNOW HIM, SO I BRUSHED THEM OFF AS BEST I COULD.
BUT ONE OF MY GIRL-FRIENDS...
STARTED SPREADING THIS RUMOR...
THAT I LIKED HIM BACK.
NO WAY.
BUT... WHY?!
YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE.


MAYBE SHE LIKED HIM HERSELF AND WANTED US TO CRASH AND BURN.
MAYBE SHE DIDN'T LIKE ME.
OR MAYBE SHE JUST LIKED JERKING PEOPLE AROUND.
SHUDDER
ANY-WAY...
THAT GUY, SUPER CONFIDENT I WAS CRAZY ABOUT HIM, ASKS ME OUT...
IN FRONT OF A CROWD ALL CONVINCED I'D SAY YES.
ARE YOU SURE YOU LIKE ME, MURA-SHIGE?
I KNEW HE'D BE HUMILIATED IF I REJECTED HIM.
AND HE SEEMED NICE ENOUGH. SO I SAID OKAY.


OH, FORGET IT.
WHY ARE WE EVEN DATING IF YOU WON'T TALK TO ME?
THE BAD GUY IN THAT STORY WAS YOUR SO-CALLED FRIEND!
AND THAT BOY DIDN'T COMMUNICATE WITH YOU PROPERLY, EITHER.
AND SO I HURT HIM. ALL BECAUSE I DIDN'T HAVE THE GUTS TO SHOOT HIM DOWN.
NOOO, NO, NO, NO!
YOU HAVE NOTHING TO BEAT YOURSELF UP OVER!
YEAH.


THAT'S WHY I'M JEALOUS OF YOU, MAKOTO.
IT'S GREAT THAT YOU GET TO GO OUT WITH SOMEONE YOU'RE EXCITED TO BE WITH.
I WANT YOU TO HAVE THE BEST DAY EVER.
SHOVE
ALL RIGHTY! DONE!
LIKE IT?
IT REALLY SUITS YOU, BUT IT MIGHT BE HARD TO REDO ON YOUR OWN.
WE CAN GO WITH SOMETHING EASIER IF YOU WANT.
NO...
I LIKE THIS ONE.
I'LL PRACTICE IT UNTIL SATURDAY.


YUZU!
I'M GONNA DO MY BEST!
THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!
Café.
Lunch.
I'll bookmark this.
Book store.


SCURRY
SCURRY
SHOOT. THOSE CONTACTS TOOK **FOREVER** TO PUT IN.
MY HAIR IS... QUESTIONABLE, BUT THERE'S NO TIME TO REDO IT.
AT LEAST IT'S STAYING UP.
WALLET, CHECK. CELL PHONE, HANDKERCHIEF... CHECK.
OKAY... LET'S DO THIS.


TO BATTLE!
TO BATTLE!
Kyaa!
I demand a selfie!♡
No.
Fight!
GOOD LUCK, MAKOTO!


A VIDEO CALL FROM MITSUMI?
THAT'S NEW.
Iwakura Mitsumi
TAP
HELLO?
GOOOOD MORNING!
BFFT!



WHAT DID YOU DO TO YOUR FACE?!
AHAHAHAHAHAHA!
HAHA!
NAO-CHAN LET ME USE HER MAKEUP.
I WENT A LITTLE CRAZY WITH IT.
I THOUGHT A GROUP CALL WOULD BE TOO MUCH, SO I DECIDED I'D ONLY SHOW YOU.
HOO—! HAAH—
YEAH, GOOD IDEA.
AND NOW I'LL GO WASH IT OFF.
EYE MAKEUP IS KIND OF STUBBORN, SO USE PLENTY OF CLEANSER.
Okey-dokey.
SHAA SPLISHA SPLASH...
......
SCRUBBA ばふ
DUBBA ばふ
HEY, LATELY...
WHATLEY?


THEY'RE ALWAYS LOOKING UP STUFF, AND THEY SHUT UP WHENEVER WE GET CLOSE.
OHHH...
D-DOESN'T IT FEEL LIKE YUZUKI AND MAKOTO ARE HIDING SOMETHING FROM US?
AHH! YOU'RE RIGHT, WE DID!
WELL, *WE* PRACTICED VOLLEYBALL IN SECRET, REMEMBER?
GLOW...
I'M SURE THEY'LL TELL US WHEN THE TIMING'S RIGHT!
AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS DO.
WINK
POSITIVE VIIIBES!


I'D NEVER SHOW ANYONE ELSE MY MAKEUP FAILS.
AND TALK ABOUT HIGH SELF-ESTEEM!
OOH. I SAVED HALF OF MY CHOCOLATE FROM YESTERDAY.
Yay.
CRUNCHA
MUNCHA
SO, WHATCHA DOIN' TODAY, MIKA-CHAN?
BUT, WELL...
I GUESS THAT'S A GOOD THING.
JUST GONNA WATCH SOME FOREIGN TV OR SOME-THING.
OOOH! WHATCHA WATCHIN'?
I MEAN, BEING TRUSTED SO IMPLICITLY...
IS, LIKE, REALLY NICE.


KURUME-SAN? IS THAT YOU?
I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU FOR A SECOND!
SORRY. HOPE YOU WEREN'T WAITING TOO LONG.
BOOKS & COFFEE

Scene 26 END



Scene ㉗ Smarting Girl 〈2〉


石波書店アネックス
Ishinami Shoten Annex
SO, READY TO GET GOING?
A-ALL RIGHT.
YOU HAVEN'T HAD LUNCH YET, HAVE YOU?
N-NO, I HAVEN'T.
WHAT ARE YOU IN THE MOOD FOR?
WELL, APPARENTLY, THIS AREA IS A CURRY BATTLE-GROUND.
OH, I DIDN'T KNOW.
LIKE THIS PLACE.
THAT LOOKS GOOD!
LET'S CHECK IT OUT.


ズラ
LINES FOR DAYS...
THAT'S A PRETTY LONG LINE.
IT SURE IS.
I'M SORRY.
HUH?
THANK YOU FOR DOING THE RESEARCH.
HEY, NO WORRIES!
How about that hamburger place we passed?
Sure, let's go there.
"NO WORRIES."


BUT IT'S BEEN A WHILE, SO I WAS REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS.
LET'S SCARF DOWN LUNCH AND START HUNTING!
Ah ha ha!
ALL RIGHT.
YOU COME TO JINBOCHO OFTEN, HONDA-SENPAI?
SURE! I GO DIGGING FOR OLD BOOKS ALL THE TIME.
THIS *IS* ONLY THE SECOND STORE WE'VE VISITED.
BUT... MAYBE I SHOULD SLOW DOWN.
UUURGH!
WOW! A FIRST EDITION!
ONLY THREE HUNDRED YEN? WHAT A STEAL!


FINE, I'LL PUT IT BACK!
IT'D MAKE SOMEONE ELSE MUCH HAPPIER!
THIS ONE SEEMS LIKE A GOOD BINGE-READ.
BUT I DON'T KNOW... I LIKE SOMETHING A BIT MEATIER.
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN!
IT HAS TO LEAVE AN IMPRESSION.
HAVE YOU READ THIS?
IT'S ON MY LIST! DID YOU LIKE IT?
HOW'S YOUR ENTRY FOR THE ANTHOLOGY COMING ALONG?
ERM...
HA HA HA!


His barely brushed hair.
THERE'S A PLETHORA OF THEM!
His unusual word usage.
Everything about him is just so... good.
I'm having a blast!
I want to take our time and really chat.
Maybe we could stop for tea?
ERM...
I-I'M GETTING PRETTY...


HM?
SORRY, WHAT DID YOU SAY?
CRACKLE
AH... ER...
EH HEH HEH!
I-I WAS JUST SAYING, YOU'RE PRETTY CLOSE TO PRESIDENT NOMA!
YEAH, I GUESS SO.
WE'RE THE ONLY SECOND-YEARS IN THE CLUB AND ALL.
AND DESPITE WHAT EVERYONE THINKS, NO, WE ARE NOT GOING OUT!
SHE TREATS ME JUST LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE SHE MEETS!
Wa ha ha!
Phew!
I...
I'VE NOTICED THAT.
ODDLY, I'VE GOT A LOT OF FRIENDS IN WIND ENSEMBLE.
DO YOU HAVE MANY FRIENDS, KURUME-SAN?
MIYA-GAWA-SAN, MAYBE?
WE CHAT DURING CLUB, BUT WE'RE IN DIFFERENT CLASSES.
MOST OF MY FRIENDS ARE IN MY CLASS.


LIKE MURASHIGE. WE WERE FRIENDS WHEN WE PASSED EACH OTHER IN THE HALLWAY.
NOT THAT THAT NARROWS IT DOWN.
Ohh.
I REMEMBER. THE PRETTY ONE.


OOH, I WANT TO CHECK OUT THE NEW RELEASES!
MIND IF WE DROP IN?
SURE.
SHOTEN GRANDE
Y...YES. THAT'S HER.
NEW RELEASES AND BESTSELLERS
NEW RELEASES AND BESTSELLERS
I'M GONNA RUN TO THE RESTROOM.
OKAY. I'LL BE AROUND HERE.


Yuzu is beautiful by anyone's standards.
"I REMEMBER. THE PRETTY ONE."
A perfectly reasonable thing to say.
And I'm a safe person for him to say that to.
THAT'S THE SORT OF GIRL HE'S ATTRACTED TO.
It's just... him telling me that sends a clear message.
Someone else might find that insensitive.
But when Senpai said it, it meant his mind wasn't fully on me.


Furiously researching places to go.
He'd be nervous.
If, in some alternate reality, he'd been book-shopping with Yuzu today, I wonder how it would have played out.
He wouldn't have suggested some burger joint to her.
At the end of the day, Honda-senpai came here for the books.
There were no ulterior motives.
But I convinced myself it was a date.
UGH. I'M GOING INTO A SPIRAL.
Cut it out!



SHAAA
"IF HE'S GIVING YOU HIS DAY OFF, THERE'S NO WAY THE ATTRACTION ISN'T MUTUAL!"
Right.
FOR ME, THAT'S A LOT.
EVEN IF HE ONLY LIKES ME AS A FELLOW BOOKWORM.
Yuzu is a different story.
Just the other day, she told me about the trauma her popularity's caused her.
Guys invade her space when she doesn't want the attention.
It's mostly blind hubris, of course...
but it's half-impressive they believe they'd stand a chance if she "just got to know" them.


MY HAIR'S COMING UNDONE.
GUESS IT WAS TOO LOOSE.
NO WONDER I KEPT BLINKING. MY EYES ARE SOOO RED!
AND ME WITHOUT ANY EYE DROPS. GO FIGURE.
MY LIPSTICK FADED AT SOME POINT, TOO.


NO.


I'VE REACHED THE POINT...
WHERE I CAN'T TRY ANY HARDER.
WHEEEW! I BOUGHT SO MANY BOOKS.
AND WE'VE WALKED QUITE A BIT TODAY, TOO.


WHAT DO YOU THINK?
I KNOW IT'S EARLY, BUT HOW ABOUT WE CALL IT A DAY?


DOINK
All done~
!
DOINK
Already?!
Murashige Yuzuki
VRRM
SURE.
BOOKS


HELLO?
H-HOW DID...HOW DID IT GO?!
MM... ALL RIGHT.
I HAD FUN.
WE TALKED BOOKS.
AWWW~! THAT'S SO GREAT!
MAKOTOOO! PLEASE KEEP HANGING WITH ME WHEN YOU'RE OFFICIAL~!
HA HA. IT'S NOT LIKE THAT.
I'M NOT CUT OUT FOR ROMANCE.

HUH? LIKE, RIGHT NOW, RIGHT NOW?!
THERE'S THIS CAFÉ I'VE WANTED TO CHECK OUT IN JINBOCHO.
COULD YOU CHILL FOR LIKE, AN HOUR UNTIL I GET THERE?
I GUESS, BUT--
GREAT! I'LL SEND YOU THE LINK.
WANNA HANG RIGHT NOW?
ZIP
WHEW...
MY FEET ARE ALL SWOLLEN.


HEY!
SORRY I MADE YOU WAIT SO LONG!
IT'S OKAY.
COLD DAY, HUH?
I'VE BEEN *DYING* TO TRY THEIR FRENCH TOAST.
WANT TO ORDER SOMETHING TOO, MAKOTO?
NO, I'M OKAY.
EXCUSE ME! CAN I PLACE AN ORDER?


HEY, MAKOTO.
TNK
UUUGH, WINTER DRIES ME RIGHT OUT.
GULP GULP
YOU LOOK SUPER CUTE TODAY!


I...!
WH-WHAT AN EMBARRASSING THING TO SAY.
SHWP
Aww.
IS IT REALLY EMBARRASSING?
I'M JUST KEEPING IT REAL.
UWAAAGH!
NEVER MIND.
F-FORGET IT.
Ha ha...
THIS *STYLE* THING IS HARD UNLESS YOU PRACTICE IT EVERY DAY, HUH?
LOOK AT MY HAIR. IT'S A WRECK.
IS IT?
OH. AROUND YOUR NAPE, YOU MEAN?


NO ONE CAN TELL, I PROMISE.
HERE, I'LL FIX IT.
PWIP
JAB


Oh!
YOU HAVE TO SEE THIS VIDEO I TOOK OF CHIFFON TODAY.
An embar-rassing thought popped into my head, too.
I should tell her. I know I should.
IT'S THE BEST! HE'LL WEAR ANY HAT YOU GIVE HIM.
I KEEP BUYING NEW ONES.
Even if I graduate high school boyfriend-less and as plain as the day I entered...
HUH? I KNOW I TOOK ONE.
WHERE IS IT...?
I'll still have someone like you to come cheer me up when I'm down.


Being friends with you makes me happier than you'll ever know.
FOUND IT!
SEE? LOOK AT HIM!
H-HEY, UH...
ISN'T HE CUTE?!


TH... THANKS...
HUH?
HERE'S YOUR FRENCH TOAST!
TNK
OOOOOH!♡


ガヤ CHATTER
ガヤ CHATTER
KLATTA
ARE WE MOVING CLASS-ROOMS NEXT?
YUP. FOR BIOLOGY!
OH.
HELLO, SENPAI.
HEY THERE.



Scene 27 END



Scene ㉘ Jingling Christmas


December.
We lined up for our exam results.
84.4
58.6
3/240
1/240
5/240
4/240
1/240
I have returned to my rightful place at the top.
And scored an excellent present to bring my family over break.
I'll slip it into a clear folder...
preserving it for the trip home!
WELL, SHE'S HAPPY.
SHE MUST HAVE DONE WELL.


And all the Christmas lights in Tokyo...
THEY MAKE EVERYTHING LOOK MORE DAZZLING.
HUH?
OH, JUST THINKING CHRISTMAS IS ALMOST HERE.
YEP, SURE IS.
THE YEAR-END ASSEMBLY IS ON CHRISTMAS EVE...
SO ALL THE COUPLES WILL BE IN UNIFORM ON THEIR CHRISTMAS DATES.
Adoles-cence. Barf.
WANT TO HAVE A KFC BINGE-FEST?
SURE DO!


WANNA HAVE A BOWLING MATCH AFTER THE CLOSING ASSEMBLY?!
WHAT?! OMIGAWD, THAT SOUNDS LIKE SO MUCH FUN!
SIGN ME UP~!
BUT... THE KFC BINGE...
I WANT TO ENJOY MY YOUTH, TOO!
Feels more comfortable with just the girls.
Aww.


SLIDE...
MORNING.
LOOK AT YOU, COMING IN JUST UNDER THE WIRE. WHY SO LATE?
TOO COLD...
PUFF...
PUFF...
WASN'T IT COLDER UP IN IKAJIMA?
IT'S A DIFFERENT KIND OF COLD.
Whew...
I ALWAYS THOUGHT TOKYO WAS DOWNRIGHT SOFT BECAUSE THE TRAINS STOPPED IF IT SNOWED THREE CENTIMETERS.
BUT THAT COLD, DRY WIND BLOWING THROUGH THE BUILDINGS?
Ohh.
IT'S JUST DIFFERENT. IT'S SO COLD IT HURTS!
Soft, huh...?
YEAH, I CAN SEE THAT.


ANYWAY, YOU WANNA GO BOWLING?
BOWLING?
NO KIDDING! YOUR HANDS ARE LIKE SANDPAPER.
DON'T YOU HAVE ANY HAND CREAM?
Ooh!
THANK YOU.
IT SMELLS SO GOOD.
SUU~ HAA~
LIKE MIKA-CHAN.
PHRAS-ING.
YOOO! LOOK AT ME ROCKIN' THIS JACKET!
I GOTTA HAVE IT!
It looks good on you.


WE'LL BE WAITING.
I'LL THINK ABOUT IT!
Good length. Good color.
MAAAN, THAT JACKET WAS SWEET.
MAYBE I'LL ASK MOM FOR MY NEW YEAR'S MONEY IN ADVANCE.
OH YEAH! THANKS FOR COMING WITH ME, GUYS!
Sure.
Culture shock.
SO THIS IS HOW FASHION-ISTAS PICK OUT THEIR CLOTHES.
I JUST CAN'T DECIDE.
MAYBE I'LL GET HER THE GELAPIQUE PAJAMAS AFTER ALL.
ALWAYS A SAFE BET.
Buying a present for his girl-friend, hunh.
Yup.
Must be nice.
Huh?
WHAT'S UP, SOU-SUKE?



MIND IF I LOOK FOR A PRESENT REAL FAST?
FOR...?
MITSUMI-CHAN.
SHE'S DONE A TON FOR ME THIS YEAR.
Hm.
Some people like strong scents, others don't.
HAND CREAM SEEMS PRETTY SAFE, SO THAT SHOULD BE OKAY.
She might like this one.
TEST
WHOA!
WHAT?!


Huh?
What?!
じぃ
ZOOM...
じぃ
ZOOM...
I'VE SUSPECTED FOR A WHILE... IS IT TRUE?
ARE YOU AND IWAKURA-SAN GOING OUT?
WHAT?!
いやいや
FLAIL FLAIL
NO WE'RE NOT!
ぶは〜!
BUAAAH!!
D'AAAGH! WHAT THE HECK?!
WE THOUGHT YOU WERE A SECRET COUPLE!


Would you like this gift wrapped?
BEEP
Yes, please.
OH! WELL, IF IT'S JUST BETWEEN FRIENDS...
......
SHE'S JUST HELPED ME THROUGH A LOT.
I *HAVE* TO THANK HER SOMEHOW.
Of all the weird ideas...
....??
IS THAT REALLY ANY BETTER?
YEAH. THE HAND CREAM.
WHAT ABOUT IT?


YOU SAY YOU'RE NOT THAT POPULAR, SOUSUKE.
BUT EVEN YOU GOTTA KNOW HOW FRICKIN' FINE YOU ARE.
PICTURE IT. YOU SMILE, THANK HER, AND HAND HER THE BAG.
IS SHE HAPPY? SURE, SHE'S HAPPY.
BUT YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE? SHE STARTS *THINKING.*
A CHRISTMAS PRESENT?
JUST FOR ME?
DOES THAT MEAN I'M *SPECIAL?*
DOES THAT MEAN HE *LIKES* ME?!


AAAHH!
THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M TRYING TO DO!
DUDE, I GET IT! BUT IF SOMEBODY TREATS A GIRL SPECIAL, OF COURSE THEY'RE GONNA START FANTASIZING!
ESPECIALLY IF THAT SOMEBODY IS YOU!
NOBODY'S SAYING THAT.
YOU JUST NEED TO BE CAREFUL.
The cutest girl in class.
SOMETIMES WHEN A PERSON THINKS SOMEONE LIKES THEM, THEY CATCH FEELINGS.
WHEN A GUY AND GIRL BECOME FRIENDS...
I'm in love!
She's talking to me! How thought-ful!
THEY NEED TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO HURT EACH OTHER. RIGHT?
Urgh...
SO, WHAT? I'M NOT ALLOWED TO BE FRIENDS WITH GIRLS?


......
MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT.
BUT HEY, IT MIGHT BE CHILL BETWEEN YOU AND IWAKURA-SAN.
IT'S JUST TWO GUYS' OPINIONS. Y'KNOW?
YEAH ...
......
WAS SOUSUKE EVER THIS OBLIVIOUS? I DON'T THINK SO.
IF ANYTHING, HE'S ALMOST **TOO** AWARE OF SOCIAL CUES.
HE'S SMOOTH WITH OTHER PEOPLE, RIGHT UP UNTIL THEY CREEP INTO HIS SPACE.
UP TILL NOW, HE'S KEPT HIS DISTANCE, ESPECIALLY FROM GIRLS.
SO, HOW DOES IWAKURA-SAN THROW HIM OFF HIS GAME...?


English 1
Closing Assembly
Happy New Year.
See ya.
HAVE A HAPPY HOLIDAY, EVERYONE! SEE YOU NEXT YEAR~!
BOUND2


OOOH!
I HAVEN'T BOWLED IN AGES!
Our girls don't play when it comes to these things.
Rocking the pants, huh? Nice.
Blew all her money at Jin-bocho...
so she's sitting this one out.
THE LOSING TEAM BUYS JUICE FOR THE WINNERS!
BEST OF THREE ROUNDS!
Paper Team
Rock Team



ポコーン
PWAP
C'MON, GO!
Ohh! So close!
パカーン
PATUNK
きゃー
SQUEE!
パカカーン
PATUNKA
Yesss!
Nailed it!
ガンッ
THUK
ゴロロロ
ROOOLL...
Next time!
TEACH ME, MIKA-SENSEI.
NO.
SORRY. I SHOW NO MERCY TO MY ENEMIES.
I THINK YOU'RE RELEASING THE BALL TOO EARLY.
Ah.
AM I?
YEAH, YOU DON'T WANT TO HURL IT. JUST ROLL IT.
ACK! THIS IS BAD.


HEY, MITSUMI!
YOU CAN CHECK YOUR FORM ON THE SCREEN!
WHAT? YOU CAN?!
YEAH, THERE'S A CAMERA THAT RECORDS YOU.
Here! Check it out.
How high-tech!
OH, WOOOW!
DO YOU GUYS BOWL TOGETHER A LOT?
WA HA HA! IT WENT STRAIGHT INTO THE GUTTER!
Yeah.
SOME-TIMES.
WHA... WHAT ON EARTH?
SHIMA-KUN'S FANS HAVE SUBTLY INSERTED THEMSELVES BETWEEN HIM AND MITSUMI!
NO WAY! DOES THE WHOLE CLASS FEEL THE VIBE BETWEEN THEM?!


Like this?
Yeah!
Ha!
THEY CALL THIS "SPECIAL TREATMENT"?
BUT...TO BE FAIR, MITSUMI-CHAN'S ONLY HUMAN.
SHE PROBABLY WISHES SHE COULD SPEND CHRISTMAS WITH SOMEONE SPECIAL.
HEY, DIDN'T NISHINO HAVE A THING FOR NAGATA-SAN?
ANYWAY, WE'VE ALL GOT ROMANCE ON THE BRAIN.


I JUST...
MUKAI AND YAMADA WERE RIGHT. I HAVEN'T BEEN CAREFUL ENOUGH.
You can do it, Shima-kun!
ガ～ター～×2
GUTTERBALL ×2
IT'S ALL SO...
GAAAAH!
HOW COULD YOU, SHIMA?!
AWW, YEAH!
BRING ON THAT SWEET, SWEET FREE JUICE!


DA
DUN!
I'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE!
SORRY, GUYS.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, SHIMA-KUN.
DROP THE KNEE...
AND LET THE WEIGHT OF THE BALL CARRY IT FORWARD!
STEP RIGHT HERE.
YOU'RE SO COOL, MITSUMI!
BUT SHE'S ALREADY ROLLED FOUR GUTTER BALLS.


PATONK
Hup, hup, hup!
ROLL ROLL ROLL...
I DID IT! I DID IT!
DUDE.
WHY IS SHE KNEEL-ING?



YAY~!
イェ〜〜
Welp. Victory is ours, I guess.
ARE YOU SURE YOU CAN'T COME, IWAKURA-SAN?
YUP!
I BOOKED US A TABLE AT AN ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BUFFET!
BOWLING
ALL RIGHT! THANKS, YAMADA.
HEH HEH.
BOWLING FRONT
AWW, MITSUMI...
I'M DINING WITH NAO-CHAN TONIGHT.
MWEH HEH.
THEN I GUESS I'LL SEE YOU... NEXT YEAR?
OH, YOU'RE RIGHT.
HAPPY NEW YEAR~!


WHERE'S SOUSUKE?
ON THE PHONE.
HE SAID WE COULD GO ON AHEAD. I'LL SEND HIM DIRECTIONS.
Clock's ticking on our table.
See you!
Happy New Year!
ガ
VRRM
HUH?
Student Discount
WEREN'T WE GOING TO DINNER?
YUP, BUT I'M GOING HOME.
OH. I SEE.


I WANTED TO SAY GOODBYE BEFORE I LEFT.
HAPPY NEW YEAR, SHIMA-KUN.
AH HA HA!
HAPPY NEW YEAR.
WAIT.
NOW'S THE TIME TO GIVE IT TO HER. RIGHT?
He unwrapped it because he thought that was too much.
Be careful!
SLAM
...
BUT ALL THAT STUFF ABOUT BEING CAREFUL AND NOT LEADING SOMEONE ON...
Look at that!
DOESN'T THAT ASSUME A LOT? AND ISN'T IT KIND OF NARCISSISTIC?


I WANT TO THANK HER.
BESIDES, WE REALLY HAVE BEEN THROUGH A LOT THIS YEAR.
WHY SHOULD I FEEL BAD ABOUT THAT?
SPIN
SPIN
BUT IF I RISK HURTING HER BY GIVING HER A PRESENT...
THEN MY DESIRE TO REPAY HER IS NOTHING BUT AN EGO TRIP!
AAAGH!


UH...
HERE.
WHAT'S THIS?
IT'S JUST SOME HAND CREAM. NOTHING SPECIAL!
YOU'VE DONE SO MUCH FOR ME THIS YEAR. I WANTED TO PAY YOU BACK.
YOU KNOW, GETTING ME INTO THE DRAMA CLUB...
だら DRIP
だら DRIP
だら DRIP
C-CONSIDER US EVEN FOR THE KEYCHAIN! IT'S NO BIGGIE! AH HA HA.


BEAM
AWWW!
THANK YOU~!
IT FEELS LIKE SUCH A WASTE TO USE IT.
IT'D BE A WASTE IF YOU DIDN'T.
OKAY. I'LL USE A LITTLE BEFORE BED.
ONLY A SMIDGE, THOUGH.
A SMIDGE?
S-SURE.


"A CHRISTMAS PRESENT?
"JUST FOR ME?
"DOES THAT MEAN I'M SPECIAL?"
YEAH.
NOW I **KNOW** I'M BEING NARCIS-SISTIC.
SKRITCH
'CAUSE I WOULDN'T MIND IF SHE FELT THAT WAY AT ALL.
Scene 28 END


Thanks! You too, Nao-chan.
MWA!
DOINK
I made it home.
Good! Have a happy new year.♡
BATAM
WAS THAT FROM YOUR NIECE?
YUP! JUST TEXTING TO SAY SHE MADE IT HOME SAFE AND SOUND.

Scene ㉙ Tranquil New Year

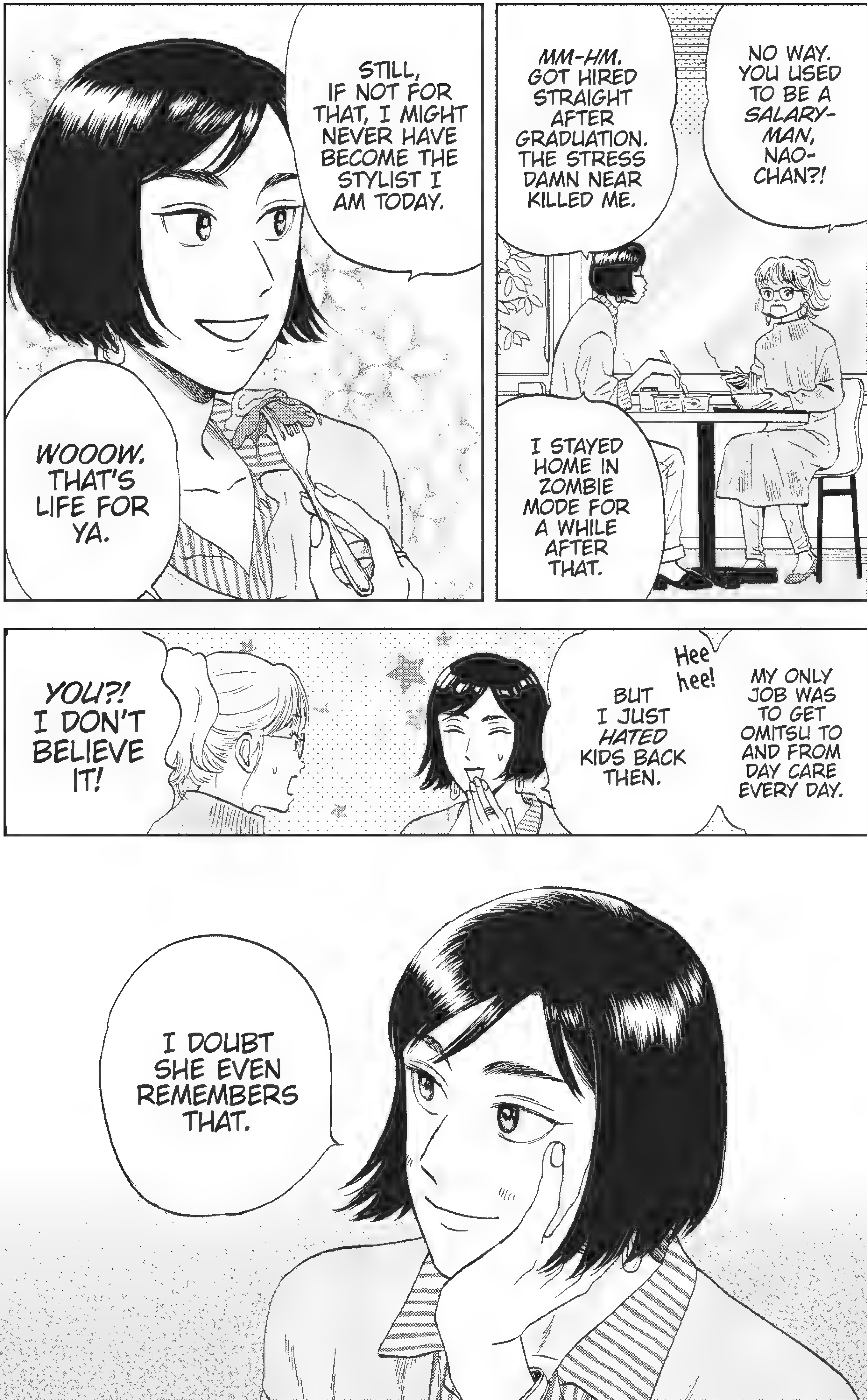



FIRST PLACE
1位
Second Semester Midterm Results
パチ CLAP
パチ CLAP
パチ CLAP
OOOOOH!
YOU'RE SO SMART, NEECHAN!
DON'T BE DRAMATIC. BUT IT'S TRUE.
MOM! NEECHAN SCORED HIGHEST IN THE WHOLE SCHOOL!
GOSH, MITSUMI! THAT'S SOMETHIN' ELSE!
DAD! COME LOOK!
THE HIGHEST SCORES IN TOKYO...?
IN THE TOP SCHOOL IN JAPAN? MY LITTLE GIRL'S A GENIUS!
WELL, IT WASN'T ALL OF TOKYO...
AND WE'RE NOT THE TOP SCHOOL.
I'LL MAKE AN OFFERING AND SHOW OUR ANCESTORS!
YEEEK!
GRANNY! IT'S NOT *THAT* SPECIAL!


That was embarrassing.
PHEW... ALL RIGHT. NO MORE DRAMA.
GRAB ME ANOTHER ORANGE, NEECHAN.
Mm!
THE DRIED SWEET POTATOES ARE TASTY THIS YEAR!
YOU WANT US TO SEND YOU SOME FROZEN ONES?
YES, PLEASE AND THANK YOU!
MUNCHA もちょ
MUNCHA もちょ
DIDJA ALWAYS LIKE SWEET POTATOES SO MUCH?
NOT REALLY. BUT FOR SOME REASON...
HEH...
THEY SURE DO TUG AT MY HEART-STRINGS LATELY.
NOW SHE'S BEING DRAMATIC.


DID YOU CALL NAO-CHAN TO LET HER KNOW YOU MADE IT?
I TEXTED HER EARLIER.
She's prob'ly still at work.
SINCE YOU BOTH HAVE PHONES NOW, I GUESS YOU WON'T BE PEN PALS ANYMORE, HUH?
GUESS NOT.
NEECHAN, LEMME PLAY A GAME ON YOUR PHONE!
NO.
WHEN DID YOU AND NAO-CHAN GET SO CLOSE, ANYWAY?
WHEN I WAS REALLY SMALL.
SHE USED TO PICK ME UP FROM NURSERY SCHOOL!
HUH?! NAO-CHAN USED TO LIVE AT HOME?!
SURE DID. BEFORE SHE QUIT HER OFFICE JOB AND BECAME A STYLIST.
SHE MUSTA BEEN, *HMM*... TWENTY-FIVE?


BUT AFTER THAT, SHE GOT IN A BIG OL' FIGHT WITH GRAMPS AND WENT BACK TO TOKYO.
THAT MUSTA BEEN FUN.
Yep!
WE USED TO PLAY ALL THE TIME.
ボ
STARE
THIS, ON TOP OF ALL THE TROUBLE SHE HAD AT WORK.
SHE WAS SOOO GLOOMY BACK THEN.
Look-it!
Am I cute?
Yeah.
Super cute.
ACTUALLY, I FEEL LIKE SHE'S TAKEN CARE OF ME MY WHOLE LIFE.
WHEN I MAKE IT BIG, I'M TAKING HER TO A HOT SPRINGS RESORT!


NO WAY. YOU USED TO BE A SALARYMAN, NAO-CHAN?!
MM-HM. GOT HIRED STRAIGHT AFTER GRADUATION. THE STRESS DAMN NEAR KILLED ME.
I STAYED HOME IN ZOMBIE MODE FOR A WHILE AFTER THAT.
STILL, IF NOT FOR THAT, I MIGHT NEVER HAVE BECOME THE STYLIST I AM TODAY.
WOOOW. THAT'S LIFE FOR YA.
MY ONLY JOB WAS TO GET OMITSU TO AND FROM DAY CARE EVERY DAY.
BUT I JUST HATED KIDS BACK THEN.
Hee hee!
YOU?! I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
I DOUBT SHE EVEN REMEMBERS THAT.


NAOKI.
I HATE TO ASK, BUT TOMOKA'S MORNING SICKNESS IS ACTING UP. MAHARU'S STILL SO LITTLE, TOO.
AND MA SAYS SHE'S GOTTA WORK. COULD YOU...?
YEAH, SURE. STARTING TOMOR-ROW, RIGHT?
THANK YOU.
YOU'RE LETTING ME STAY WITH YOU. IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO.


MICCHAN! TIME TO GO HOOOME!
YOUR UNCLE CAME TO PICK YOU UP. ISN'T THAT NICE?
WHISPER
WHISPER
TUP TUP TUP
で で で
YUP!
GOODBYE, SENSEI!
Bye-bye, Fumi-chan!
EUGH!
HER HAND'S ALL... GRIMY.
SQUEEZE


NAOKI-KUN?
HI! WE WENT TO SCHOOL TOGETHER.
Oh!
TSUKADA-SAN?!
THAT'S ME!
DIDJA MOVE BACK INTO TOWN?
NO... I'M ON HOLIDAY FROM WORK.
OH, I SEE.
SAY, THE HIGH SCHOOL GANG'S GETTING TOGETHER FOR DRINKS LATER. YOU SHOULD COME.
UH, SURE. IF I CAN MAKE IT.
Hee hee!
THAT'S A NO IF I EVER HEARD ONE.


LISTEN. THE GUYS HAVE DONE SOME GROWING UP.
GIVE 'EM ANOTHER CHANCE. YOU MIGHT HAVE FUN.
RIGHT.
SCREW THAT.
CAN YOU MAKE FLOWER CROWNS, NAOKI-KUN?
NOPE.
WELL, I CAN!
Now you twist it...
YOU JUST GOTTA PUT 'EM TOGETHER LIKE THIS, AND...
......


LOOKIT!
AM I CUTE?
YEAH. SUPER CUTE.
I'M SO JEALOUS, MITSUMI.
I'VE ALWAYS WISHED I COULD BE A PRETTY GIRL WHO WEARS PRETTY THINGS LIKE YOU.


HMMM.
THE IDEAS OF NORMAL AND ABNORMAL YET.
SHE'S ONLY FOUR. SHE PROBABLY HASN'T INTERNALIZED...
DASH
HER FUTURE HOLDS SO MUCH POTENTIAL. MUST BE NICE.
WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?


HERE, NAOKI-KUN!
LET'S HEAD HOME, MITSUMI.
M'KAY.


IS THIS... FOR ME?
YUP!
AM I... CUTE?
YUP!
SUPER CUTE!


HUGGLES!
EEEEK!
HEY!


AND THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME ANYONE EVER GAVE ME A BRACELET.
AWW! THAT'S TOO CUTE!
ISN'T IT? AND THE OTHER DAY, SHE--
KLATTA
Here she goes.
WE'D BETTER GET BACK TO WORK, HUH?
WHITE TEAM ISN'T GOING DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT!
PASS THE SHREDDED SQUID!
YAAAAWN
YOU'RE EATING TOO MUCH.
LOOKS LIKE WE'LL BE SHOVELIN'.
OH, IS IT STICKING?


IT'S SAKAMOTO NATSUMI-SAN, THE LAST PERFORMER OF THE YEAR.
OH! SO LATE ALREADY?
ふがっ
SNRRT!
DAD, DAD!
NATSUMI-SAN'S ON!
MNGH?! M'KAY...
ピョン
BOING
ピョン
BOING
I'M GONNA JUMP INTO THE NEW YEAR!
ドス
BAMF
ドス
BAMF
HEY! DON'T SHAKE THE FLOOR RIGHT NOW!
I'M GONNA KEEP ON STUDYING INTO THE NEW YEAR.
YOU WEREN'T STUDYING BEFORE.
THE POSE IS WHAT MATTERS. IT'S LIKE MAKING A WISH!



ゴーン
GOOONG
Out with the old, in with the new!
ゴーン
GOOONG
TIK
HAPPY NEW YEAR!
OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW!


DID SHE FALL ASLEEP?
SERI-OUSLY?
OUT WIDDUH... UH...
UWAAAH!
I FELL ASLEEEEP!
THAT'S A SIGN YOU OUGHTA TAKE IT EASY THIS YEAR.
Up we go.
LET'S ALL GO TO BED.
VRRRR
VRRRR
GOTTA PEE!
TROMP
TROMP
CONTINENTAL UNIVERSITY 1898


HEY, NAOKI.
HAPPY NEW YEAR.
HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU TOO, NIICHAN!
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO?
ENJOYING MY NIGHT-CAP.
ALL MY WORK'S SQUARED AWAY! ♡
SIP ♡
YEAH? THAT'S GOOD.
NAOKI...
THANKS FOR WATCHING AFTER MITSUMI. FROM ALL OF US.
HAPPY TO HELP.
ALSO...
CONTINENTAL UNIVERSITY since


MA MISSES YOU SOMETHING FIERCE.
YOU OUGHTA COME HOME MORE OFTEN.
YEAH, I OUGHTA.
YOU KNOW...
A LOT OF BAD THINGS HAPPENED TO ME BACK THERE. IN IKAJIMA.
I KNOW.


BUT I'M THRIVING HERE IN TOKYO.
I HAVE A JOB I LOVE...
AND THAT'S NOT LIKELY TO CHANGE.
To Nao-chan
From Mitsumi


BUT YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE I REMEMBER?


I REALLY LOVED THAT SEA OF WEEDS...
JUST DOWN THE WAY FROM OUR HOUSE.
SO, I'M THINKING I'LL VISIT THIS SUMMER.
MAYBE I'LL RENT A CAR.


AND LOAD IT UP WITH MITSUMI'S FRIENDS!


ボフ ボフ ボフッ
BOMF
BOMF
WAHOO!
YOU CAN PLAY IN THE SNOW AFTER WE SHOVEL.
I can't get the car out.


THIS YEAR, I'LL BE JUST LIKE THE FRESHLY DRIVEN SNOW.
ザク
SHUNK
HUH?
ザク
SHUNK


I'LL TAKE ON THE WORLD WITH MY HEART FRESH AND NEW!
JEEZ, NEECHAN! YOU'RE SO DRAMATIC!
Scene 29 END

Baby Steps ①



Baby Steps ②





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I am truly indebted to all of you.

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★ My Editor ★

Miyazaki-san

Skip and Loafer

Passionate



* A reference to *Kamen Rider Kuuga,* from around 2000.

** A reference to *Kamen Rider Fourze,* which aired around 2011.

Christmas Dinner



Skip and Loafer





Skip and Loafer

SEVEN SEAS ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS

Skip and Loafer

Vol. 5

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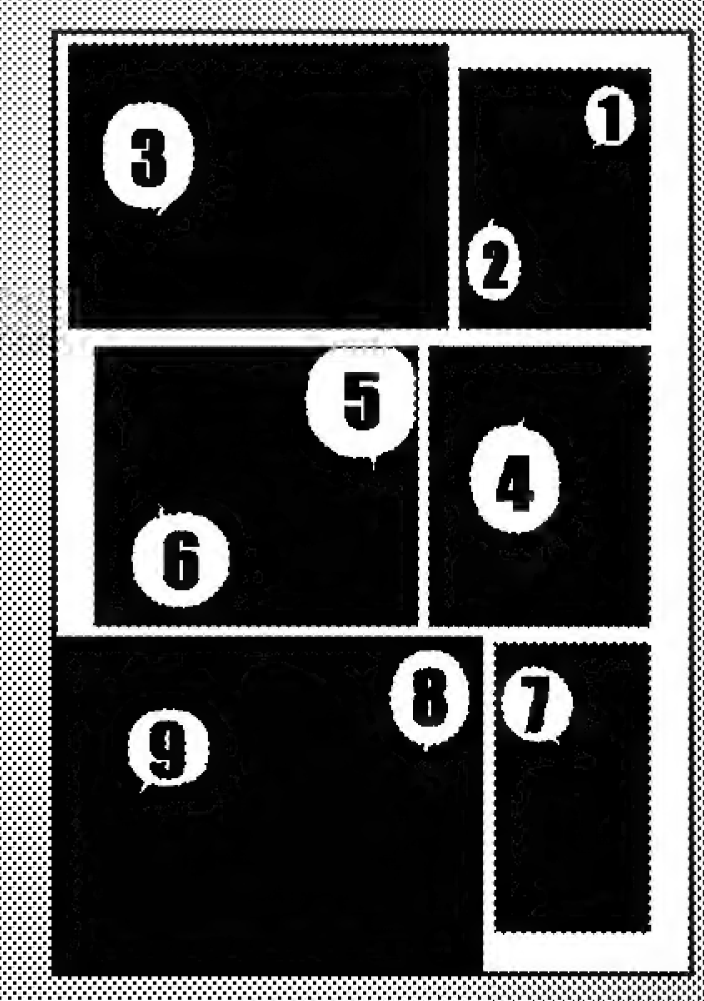
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READING DIRECTIONS

This book reads from ***right to left***, Japanese style. If this is your first time reading manga, you start reading from the top right panel on each page and take it from there. If you get lost, just follow the numbered diagram here. It may seem backwards at first, but you'll get the hang of it! Have fun!!





Endings and Beginnings

As fall turns into winter, Mitsumi and her friends say goodbye to the first half of their freshman year. Meanwhile, Mitsumi's friendship with Shima-kun takes on a whole new depth.

TEEN (13+)

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